



CHILD CARE

State Capacity Building Center

## Digital Communications Recommendations

Digital Communications Planning Guide

RESOURCE  
GUIDE

# Recommendations for Increasing Visibility and Awareness for Your Consumer Education Website





# Recommendations for Increasing Visibility and Awareness for Your Consumer Education Website

## Table of Contents

<b>How Can a Digital Communications Plan Support Your Work?</b> . . . . .	<b>3</b>
<b>How Can This Guide Help You?</b> . . . . .	<b>3</b>
<b>Preplanning Steps</b> . . . . .	<b>4</b>
Review and Consider Foundational Elements of Your Consumer Education Website . . . . .	4
Develop Website Promotion and Communications Goals and Objectives . . . . .	4
<b>Recommendations</b> . . . . .	<b>5</b>
<b>1. Review Existing Technical Assistance Resources</b> . . . . .	<b>5</b>
Webinars and Online Modules . . . . .	5
Written Products . . . . .	5
<b>2. Gather Information</b> . . . . .	<b>6</b>
Conduct a Website Scan. . . . .	6
Obtain User Feedback . . . . .	6
<b>3. Develop Messaging and a Messaging Architecture</b> . . . . .	<b>7</b>
Develop Messaging and a Messaging Architecture. . . . .	7
Conduct Message Testing . . . . .	8
<b>4. Develop a Social Media Strategy</b> . . . . .	<b>9</b>
<b>5. Develop and Maintain Useful Web Content</b> . . . . .	<b>10</b>
<b>6. Build Partnerships and Strengthen Outreach</b> . . . . .	<b>11</b>
Develop and Expand Partnerships . . . . .	11
Engage Stakeholders. . . . .	12
<b>7. Increase Public Awareness</b> . . . . .	<b>14</b>
Improve Your Website's Search Engine Optimization . . . . .	14
Leverage Branding to Increase Recognition and Strengthen Awareness . . . . .	14
Develop Public Awareness Campaigns . . . . .	15
<b>8. Develop a Website Analytics Program</b> . . . . .	<b>18</b>
<b>9. Develop a Crisis Communications Process</b> . . . . .	<b>19</b>
<b>Appendix A. Messaging Architecture Example</b> . . . . .	<b>20</b>
<b>Appendix B. Social Media Strategy Framework</b> . . . . .	<b>21</b>



# Recommendations for Increasing Visibility and Awareness for Your Consumer Education Website

## How Can a Digital Communications Plan Support Your Work?

In this digital age, families are increasingly reliant on digital information. Your Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) Lead Agency's child care consumer education website provides an incredible opportunity to establish itself as the child care information gateway for families in your jurisdiction. An effective child care consumer education website ensures that information about child care is easily accessible and transparent, providing families with the information they need to make informed child care decisions and engage in the development of their children—both at home and in child care settings. When a state develops an effective consumer education website, both the CCDF Lead Agency and the consumer benefit:

1. The CCDF Lead Agency is better able to reach their target audience and build awareness for the resources and services they offer.
2. The consumer is able to more easily access information about your services—anytime, anywhere—and use that information to make informed child care choices.

If you want your target audience to visit your consumer education website and use the key information and resources it provides, you must ensure that they know about it. A comprehensive digital communications plan can help you do this.

Strategic, ongoing communication is the key to increasing public awareness for your consumer education website. There are a wide variety of communication methods you can use to accomplish this: social media, email listservs, print materials, partnership-building events, information meetings, and so on. To be successful, all your communication channels should be strategically coordinated. A thoughtful digital communications plan helps you develop and coordinate communication efforts that are tied to your digital goals, support goal attainment, and ensure consistent, effective messaging. When your digital communications are coordinated, consistent, and dynamic, you will be able to increase the visibility, awareness, and credibility of your consumer education website across all target audiences.

## How Can This Guide Help You?

This guide aims to help you develop a comprehensive digital communications plan to increase visibility, awareness, and credibility for your consumer education website across all target audiences.

It presents a wide range of recommendations, rooted in best practice, that can boost the efficacy of your digital strategy plan. These best practice recommendations support the key goals of an effective digital communications plan:

- Build awareness and credibility for your consumer education website
- Increase the visibility of your website and move traffic to it
- Strengthen engagement with key stakeholders
- Build partnerships to sustain coordinated efforts
- Respond effectively during a crisis

Review these recommendations and consider which options may work best in your digital communications planning, based on your needs, priorities, and resources.



# Recommendations for Increasing Visibility and Awareness for Your Consumer Education Website

## Preplanning Steps

Before you begin your digital communications planning, consider these important preplanning steps. Each action item will help prepare you for a more fruitful planning process.

### Review and Consider Foundational Elements of Your Consumer Education Website

Your digital communications plan should complement the mission and goals of your consumer education website. Before launching into developing a communications plan, first check with your larger agency to determine if it already has a plan that you may be able to adapt. Also, be sure to consider key aspects of your consumer education website, which should inform your communications efforts. These aspects should include the following:

- Title and URL address of your consumer education website
- Mission of your consumer education website
- Target audience for your consumer education website (such as families and caregivers, child care professionals, and community stakeholders)
- Goals and objectives for your child care consumer education website, which may come directly from your larger digital strategy plan for your consumer education website, or—if you do not currently have a digital strategy plan—consider developing one to guide your website improvement efforts

#### What Is a Digital Strategy Plan?

A digital strategy plan outlines the mission, goals, and objectives for your child care consumer education website.

It should delineate the key tasks required to maintain and improve your consumer education website so that you may support your agency's digital consumer education and outreach goals and meet the informational needs of your target audience.

### Develop Website Promotion and Communications Goals and Objectives

An effective digital communications plan is guided by specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART) goals and objectives. The CCDF Lead Agency, together with its website development, content management, and communications staff, and applicable vendors, should develop specific, short-term objectives for each communications goal (listed below) to measure success and maintain momentum toward full goal achievement. Link these objectives to measurable outcomes by using a SMART approach. Taking the time to set SMART objectives tied to specific goals up front will make tracking and assessing your efforts much easier and less time consuming.

- Specific—The objective clearly states what will be done and who will do it.
- Measurable—The objective includes how the action will be measured. Measuring your objectives helps you determine if you are making progress. It also keeps you on track and on schedule.
- Achievable—The objective is realistic given your resources and capacity.
- Relevant—A relevant objective supports your consumer education website promotion efforts.
- Time-bound—Every objective has a specific timeline for completion.



#### Helpful Resources

- [Consumer Education Website Online Module Series: Module 2 - Promoting Your Consumer Education Website](#)





# Recommendations for Increasing Visibility and Awareness for Your Consumer Education Website

## Recommendations

This section presents a wide array of best practice recommendations that can help you develop an effective digital communications plan that will support your website promotion and communications goals.

### 1. Review Existing Technical Assistance Resources

**Recommendation:** First, review relevant Child Care State Capacity Building Center (SCBC) resources to learn about key best practices for consumer education website promotion and communications. This material should help guide your plan development and implementation efforts.

SCBC has created several products that aim to help CCDF Lead Agencies increase the visibility of their consumer education website and bolster their digital communications capabilities. These products provide key website promotion strategies that states and territories can use to help their audience find, remember, and connect with their website. Additionally, SCBC has created several products to help jurisdictions leverage their consumer education website as a communication tool.

SCBC's [Consumer Education Website Continuous Improvement Series](#) aims to help CCDF Lead Agencies create effective, family-friendly consumer education websites. Additional suites of resources will be added as they are completed.

#### Webinars and Online Modules

- [Child Care Consumer Education Website Communications Strategies](#)
- Consumer Education Website Online Module Series:
  - [Module 1 - Building a Family-Friendly Website](#)
  - [Module 2 - Promoting Your Consumer Education Website](#)
  - [Module 3 - Using Data to Support Continuous Website Improvement](#)
- [Leveraging Child Care Consumer Education Websites During Emergencies and Disasters: Tips and Best Practices](#)
- [Using Social Media to Enhance Your Web Presence](#)
- [Understanding Your Consumer Education Brand](#)

#### Written Products

- [Branding Your Consumer Education Website: A Guide for States and Territories](#)
- [Spotlight on Emergency Preparedness, Response, and Recovery Content Resource Suite](#)
- [Guide for Increasing Search Engine Optimization](#)
- [Social Media Strategies to Support Consumer Education Websites](#)
- [Using Social Media to Enhance Your Web Presence and Understanding Your Consumer Education Brand: Questions and Answers from the “Ask Me Anything” Webinars](#)

#### Tip: Understanding Level of Effort and Impact

A level of effort and level of impact is included within each section to help you consider which communication options may work best for your agency.

The level of effort (low, medium, and high) seeks to measure how many human and financial resources are needed to implement each recommendation.

The level of impact is scored from 1 to 5, with 1 being a very low level of impact and 5 being the highest level of impact. Level of impact is defined as how much each recommendation could improve awareness of the CCDF Lead Agency and its child care consumer education website.



# Recommendations for Increasing Visibility and Awareness for Your Consumer Education Website

## 2. Gather Information

Information-gathering activities, such as conducting a website scan and obtaining user feedback, are an important component of preplanning. Each will help you identify best practices, successes, and failures that you should use to guide your digital planning.

### Conduct a Website Scan

Conducting a scan of the websites that serve families and education professionals can help you identify key insights on how other organizations have approached digital communications, website content and design, and website promotion.

**Recommendation:** Using what you learned in the SCBC resources above as a guide, conduct a scan of websites within and outside of your jurisdiction that pertain to child care, child and family services, and early childhood education to identify websites that use best practices.

Use ChildCare.gov to start. As the national child care consumer education website, [ChildCare.gov](https://www.childcare.gov) is the trusted source for families to learn about federal and state child care resources. It provides information and connects families directly to resources that help them learn about their child care options, make more informed child care choices, engage in the development of their child, and learn about the full array of resources and supports available to them in their state or territory. ChildCare.gov has a dedicated state resource page for your jurisdiction that provides a ready hub of links to services for children and families in your jurisdiction. It may be helpful to scan these websites first, and then expand as needed. You can also use ChildCare.gov to identify how other states have approached key components of their consumer education website, including design features and content elements. You could use this information to identify strategies and features that may work well in your jurisdiction and incorporate that information into planning continuous improvement of your consumer education website.

**Recommendation:** Identify strategic questions to sharpen your focus and find the information that will help inform your digital communications planning. For example, how are other organizations or states leveraging social media to communicate with their stakeholders? Has branding helped build recognition for other sites? Which websites are the most family-friendly, and why? The scan will help inform content development for your consumer education website and identify methods of communication that may work best for your jurisdiction (for example, email blasts, print materials, social media posts, presentations, speeches, and so on).

### Obtain User Feedback

User feedback is the information—including insights, issues, and input—that is collected from a website's target audience about their experiences with your website. You can also gather feedback about your current communications efforts and assess how well they are connecting your audience back to your consumer education website.

**Recommendation:** Leverage user feedback to see what your target audience thinks about your current website and current communications efforts. User feedback can help you maximize engagement through the consumer education website in an actionable way. Engaging stakeholders through user feedback opportunities can help you understand what users think about the consumer education website. Users include all segments of your target audience, such as families, child care professionals, and other stakeholders. User feedback can help you keep your website improvement efforts connected to the specific needs of your target audience, especially as those needs evolve.



### Helpful Resources

- [Consumer Education Website Online Module Series: Module 3 - Using Data to Support Continuous Website Improvement](#)



# Recommendations for Increasing Visibility and Awareness for Your Consumer Education Website

## 3. Develop Messaging and a Messaging Architecture

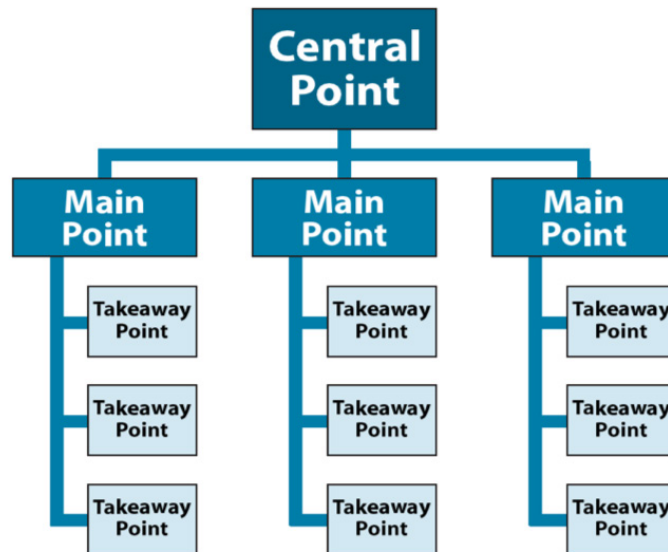
Developing strategic, compelling, and concise messages is important to the success of any communications plan. Your communication strategies should deliver effective messages that resonate with your intended audiences and motivate them to act in ways that support your communications goals.

Messaging will vary based on the target audience of the communication (such as families and caregivers versus child care professionals). Developing proactive messaging and a messaging architecture will support effective promotional strategies and ensure you use consistent and effective messages across those efforts.

### Develop Messaging and a Messaging Architecture

Messages can be condensed to drill down to the “know” and “do” messages. That is, messages should succinctly address what you want target audiences to know and do after reading strategic communications (such as a social media post or email) or content on the consumer education website. You may consider using a messaging architecture (see Appendix A) or message map framework (see figure below) to develop a plain language central message point, main message points, and takeaway message points.

**Figure 1. Message Map Framework**



**Recommendation:** Using key insights from the website scan together with the best practices described in the SCBC resources, develop messages that support your communications goals and objectives. These messages will serve as a foundation for updating your consumer education website content as well as developing other online and social media communications. Additionally, create a messaging architecture to further support ongoing communication efforts.



# Recommendations for Increasing Visibility and Awareness for Your Consumer Education Website

## Conduct Message Testing

Formal message testing ensures that you are communicating the right message to key segments of your target audience—including families, providers, and other stakeholders. Each segment of your target audience needs different information. Families may want to know about how to choose quality child care and need to search for care, while providers may need to access required forms and processes and learn about child care provider resources and professional development opportunities. The website scan and messaging platform help you build messages, while the formal message testing groups help you determine if those messages are correct and resonate with the intended audiences.

**Recommendation:** Conduct online or phone message testing with six triads (in other words, small group discussions with three participants) with the following audience segments: 1) families and caregivers, 2) providers, and 3) other stakeholders. The purpose of this testing is to 1) find out how and where each of these groups get their child care information, whether it be online, traditional media, word of mouth, and so on, and 2) obtain their feedback on messages. This valuable feedback can be used to enhance your digital strategy, as well as other communication pieces produced by your agency. This testing will provide insights into the following questions: Are the messages clear and understandable? Are the messages actionable? How well do messages encourage an audience member to contact or use your consumer education website?





# Recommendations for Increasing Visibility and Awareness for Your Consumer Education Website

## 4. Develop a Social Media Strategy

More people are turning to social media to find and share information. With a large percentage of your target audience already online, you can use social media as another tool to increase the visibility of a consumer education website. As such, a social media strategy should be a key piece of your digital communications arsenal. You can leverage social media to drive traffic to the child care consumer education website, build awareness for the site, and add a new, more dynamic dimension to its family and stakeholder engagement efforts.



### Helpful Resources

- [Consumer Education Website Online Module Series: Module 2 - Promoting Your Consumer Education Website](#)
- [Branding Your Consumer Education Website: A Guide for States and Territories](#)
- [Social Media Strategies to Support Consumer Education Websites](#)
- [Using Social Media to Enhance Your Web Presence \(webinar\)](#)
- [Understanding Your Consumer Education Brand \(webinar\)](#)
- [Using Social Media to Enhance Your Web Presence and Understanding Your Consumer Education Brand: Questions and Answers](#)
- [Child Care Consumer Education Website Communications Strategies \(webinar\)](#)

**Recommendation:** Assess your current social media efforts. Conduct an audit of existing agency social media platforms. Consider the following questions: Does your larger agency permit social media use? If yes, can you create a specific account for information related to child care, or must it be managed through a broader agency account?

A social media audit helps administrators understand what is and is not working in their current social media efforts. It also allows them to see who is or is not engaging with content and how their efforts are performing alongside the competition.

**Recommendation:** Develop social media strategies that support your communication goals and objectives. Using insights from the previous recommended tasks and SCBC resources, consider using the social media framework (see Appendix B) as a guide for developing a strategic and concise social media plan. The plan should include clear communications goals and objectives, an audience profile, specifications for posting content (including messaging, tone of voice, use of images, length of post, hashtags, and so on), post timing (including day of the week, time of day, frequency, and so on), content calendar, and metric measurements.

Please see [Consumer Education Website Online Module Series: Module 2 - Promoting Your Consumer Education Website](#) to learn about best practices for managing and maintaining a social media presence.

**Recommendation:** Leverage partnerships to extend your social media reach. Identify partners or other stakeholders with a wide social media presence who may be able to share or tag your agency's resources and consumer education website. Identify other stakeholders who may benefit from mutually beneficial cross-posting of resources. You may consider developing collaborative partnerships with state agency partners, trusted community organizations, news outlets, parenting organizations, and child care social media influencers (such as child care providers and families) that complement your mission and message. This list can be used like a media list to contact thought leaders with story ideas and information about your agency that can be shared via social media.



# Recommendations for Increasing Visibility and Awareness for Your Consumer Education Website

## 5. Develop and Maintain Useful Web Content

Developing and maintaining accurate, useful, and up-to-date content on your consumer education website is critical to building credibility with your audience as the “go to” source for child care information in your jurisdiction.

Web content maintenance is more than just updating and adding pages—it also means retiring content that has outlived its usefulness. One of the best ways to ensure that content is fresh and current is to implement a consistent content maintenance process and schedule and stick to it.



### Helpful Resources

- Consumer Education Website Online Module Series:
  - [Module 1 - Building a Family-Friendly Website](#)
  - [Module 2 - Promoting Your Consumer Education Website](#)

**Recommendation:** Establish a content management process to ensure that your web content stays up to date and relevant. Use this process to identify where you can consolidate duplicate content, update incorrect content, remove content that target audiences no longer need, and create new content.

- Clearly define your team roles and responsibilities for creating, approving, and publishing content to the website. After publishing your content, consider how to maintain and conduct quality assurance on it. Determine who has the authority to make strategic decisions and who has the authority to make implementation decisions.
  - Someone with strategic authority (usually one person) is responsible for overall performance of the site.
  - Someone with implementation authority has day-to-day responsibilities and provides editorial oversight.
- Create and implement a regular content maintenance schedule. Determine when existing content will be reviewed to identify opportunities for updates or to create new content. Conduct regular web audits to inventory pages and identify out-of-date and irrelevant content or broken links.
- Maintain or develop content that supports your goals and mission. When deciding whether to keep or remove content, having a guiding vision in mind is important. Make sure that the web team is working toward well-defined goals for the site, and not just retiring pages without a strategy in place.
- Assess content by category, not just by location. Look at content by type rather than by location on your site to help identify mis-categorizations, duplications, and content areas that are turning into silos or may be disconnected.
- Follow the right order in a pre-established content process. It can be tempting to jump right in and start tossing troublesome pages down the trash chute of web history—but skipping steps can lead to wasted effort. You do not have to evaluate your website all at once. Do it in phases or prioritize key sections.
- Ask web users if the content accomplishes its goals. Obtain feedback from users, assess web traffic data, and consider any emerging needs to inform how you develop website content. This will help you make sure it reflects what your users are seeking or may need. Also, make sure you seek feedback and buy-in from key stakeholders.

### Importance of Plain Language

To be effective, all communications, whether in print or in digital form, must be clearly written and understandable to your target audience. Applying plain language best practice is essential.

- Center for Plain Language. (n.d.). *Five steps to plain language*. <https://centerforplainlanguage.org/learning-training/five-steps-plain-language/>
- Plain Language Action and Information Network. (n.d.). *Follow web standards*. General Services Administration. <https://plainlanguage.gov/guidelines/web/>
- Plain Language Action and Information Network. (n.d.). *Federal plain language guidelines*. General Services Administration. <https://plainlanguage.gov/guidelines/>



# Recommendations for Increasing Visibility and Awareness for Your Consumer Education Website

## 6. Build Partnerships and Strengthen Outreach

By leveraging stakeholder engagement and building partnerships, you can extend your reach and increase the visibility of your agency and your consumer education website. Engagement can give more “legs” to your communications efforts by offering additional communication channels, events, speaking opportunities, and media hooks.

### Develop and Expand Partnerships

An outreach strategy that is closely linked to enhancing your agency’s existing network of partners is ideal. Engage partners who are already participating in existing programs, collaborative efforts, and councils.

For partnerships to be successful, a mutually beneficial relationship is critical. That is, you should identify partners who not only reach your target audiences but are also best positioned to gain from the partnership themselves. You can identify and create mutually beneficial relationships based on the unique reach, relevancy, and opportunities of each partner.

**Recommendation:** Strengthen engagement with partners by using the following strategies:

- Reach partners’ customers, constituents, and employees through
  - speaking opportunities at partner events;
  - outreach to partners’ employees through internal channels, such as CEO, Executive Director, or company-wide blogs and newsletters; and
  - partners’ promotional channels, such as social media channels, websites, and blogs.
- Invite partners to participate in program efforts to further their reach through
  - joint promotion of community events and
  - joint pitches to media around common topics of interest about child care, including roundtable discussions and state outlet interview opportunities.
- Foster opportunities for collaboration, such as
  - cobranding collateral materials;
  - cobranding community events;
  - cowriting blog posts or op-ed articles; and
  - cross-promoting applicable social media messages.

**Recommendation:** Actively seek partnership-building opportunities.

Before implementing the partnership strategy, outreach should be initiated through a series of recruitment activities to build the number of partners in the program. These activities might include web marketing and social networking. You could also conduct webinars and in-person presentations. This will educate potential partners about how to contribute to the awareness of your agency (and its consumer education website) and disseminate program resources to partner constituents. A series of activities can be designed to educate and motivate partners to increase their participation, including the following:

- Face-to-face meetings and outreach sessions to describe your programs, services, and consumer education website, and garner support for the organization
- Email blasts and electronic newsletters that provide program information to promote greater awareness of consumer education website



# Recommendations for Increasing Visibility and Awareness for Your Consumer Education Website

- Webinars to educate partners and highlight how you can help families and providers
- Attendance and participation at selected events

**Recommendation:** Ensure that you are developing mutually beneficial partnerships.

Work with each partner to understand what they are looking to gain from the partnership and how the partnership could help both partners extend their reach. A first step to cultivate new partnerships and enhance current ones will be to create a detailed partnership development and maintenance plan that includes the following:

- An overview of the specific objective of the partnership, measures of success, timeline for outreach, and categories of traditional and nontraditional partnerships to explore
- A list of potential partners, including each partner's objectives, affiliations, audiences, communication vehicles, and reach, as well as contact information
- An analysis of where the partners can best contribute to your CCDF Lead Agency's engagement efforts so that resources are allocated effectively; this will include a determination of partner activities such as outreach collaboration and information dissemination, capacity building, and meetings with partner constituents
- A plan for regular engagement of partners through one-on-one meetings, group meetings, webinars, or conference calls that promote two-way communication
- A plan for contacting each partner and tracking and evaluating all partners' statuses and contact information over time, as well as the effectiveness of each partner

## Engage Stakeholders

To extend your reach and increase public awareness for your website and your agency, you must continue to foster a community of highly engaged, energized, and active stakeholders. The most productive stakeholder relationships are those that are nurtured over time, with regular touch points in between "asks." Engaging a community of stakeholders who share a common goal but offer differing perspectives requires an approach that develops awareness, motivates the desire to engage, and fosters and maintains engagement. Based on your priorities, you should identify avenues for collaborating with influential stakeholders who can increase awareness of your agency and your consumer education website. Key aspects of stakeholder engagement include the following:

- **Define and prioritize stakeholders.** Define the scope of the stakeholder audiences, and you can then prioritize them based on their reach, existing communications channels, and perceived credibility.
- **Be consistent with communication.** As you develop new messages or release content, keeping major stakeholders up to date is critical. Each stakeholder is unique and needs to feel engaged in the process. Ensure that you are providing timely, effective, and ongoing communications on updates about services and your consumer education website. Also, be sure to provide ongoing information about how stakeholders can be involved in reinforcing and sharing your message.
- **Ensure simplicity.** Ensuring that each call to action is as simple as possible for stakeholders to execute is essential to garnering ongoing engagement. Stakeholder briefings, easy-access digital toolkits, or simple content like a prewritten tweet and a hashtag, all contribute to successful engagement and promotion. You may provide "ready to share" content that can be easily used across communication channels and matches the needs of the stakeholders' constituents. By making cross-promotional efforts as simple and easy to implement as possible, you will help drive traffic to and increase awareness of your consumer education website.



## Recommendations for Increasing Visibility and Awareness for Your Consumer Education Website

- Foster ongoing connection and collaboration. Be sure to direct target audiences to your consumer education website to inform them of activities, happenings, progress, and opportunities. Be sure to connect the community via two-way social media communication channels; provide links to relevant information, resources, programs, and tools; and establish a survey capability (or access to a survey capability) that is used to engage the community in “weighing in on” website content and offerings.

**Tip:** Individual emails should be sent to stakeholder thought leaders. Mass emails are impersonal and do not help establish a rapport with bloggers or social media influencers.

**Recommendation:** Establish a process to guide stakeholder engagement and outreach-strategy development to ensure that they connect with your overall CCDF Lead Agency strategic plan and goals.





# Recommendations for Increasing Visibility and Awareness for Your Consumer Education Website

## 7. Increase Public Awareness

Increasing public awareness for your agency, its programs and services, and its consumer education website is a core goal of your digital communications plan. To make progress toward this goal, consider incorporating the following best practices into your digital communications plan.

### Improve Your Website's Search Engine Optimization

Search engines have become a part of our daily life. They serve millions of users each day who are looking to find information and resources quickly. Ensuring that your audience can find your website when using a search engine is essential to the success of your website. Search engine optimization—or SEO—helps increase the visibility of your website and ensures that people can find it more readily when they use a search engine. This is why SEO is an important digital marketing tool.

**Recommendation:** To ensure your audience can easily find your consumer education website via an online search, you should work with your website development and content management teams to ensure that SEO best practices are applied to your website. Consumer Education Website Online Module Series: Module 2 - Promoting Your Consumer Education Website provides detailed information about SEO best practices.



#### Helpful Resources

- [Consumer Education Website Online Module Series: Module 2 - Promoting Your Consumer Education Website](#)
- [Guide for Increasing Search Engine Optimization](#)

### Leverage Branding to Increase Recognition and Strengthen Awareness

Creating a brand is another way to build awareness for a consumer education website and connect with the website's target audience. In this age of electronic information overload, branding distinguishes your consumer education website from other websites. An effective brand will make your website memorable, helping families recognize it as the primary resource for early education and child care information in the state. When consumers connect with your brand, they will remember your website and come back to it.



#### Helpful Resources

- [Branding Your Consumer Education Website: A Guide for States and Territories](#)
- [Understanding Your Consumer Education Brand](#)
- [Using Social Media to Enhance Your Web Presence and Understanding Your Consumer Education Brand: Questions and Answers](#)
- [Consumer Education Website Online Module Series: Module 2 - Promoting Your Consumer Education Website](#)

**Recommendation:** Create and apply a brand to set the CCDF Lead Agency's consumer education website apart from others and build consumer recognition. We recommend incorporating this brand into all communications (including social media and print materials) to create visual cohesion across products that further strengthens consumer recognition.



# Recommendations for Increasing Visibility and Awareness for Your Consumer Education Website

## Develop Public Awareness Campaigns

Public awareness campaigns (PACs) can add depth to a comprehensive strategy to promote awareness. These campaigns could include a variety of modalities such as brochures, bus wraps, radio spots, television (TV) advertisements, social media posts, videos, and internal communications tactics. The most effective campaigns design messages for target audiences by drawing on theories of behavior and social change. A PAC can strengthen your outreach by addressing the dynamic nature of your target audience. There is a continual churn of new families and caregivers who need child care, new child care providers, and staff entering the child care workforce. Accordingly, it's important that you have a mechanism to reach those families so that they know how to access reliable information on child care.

Although every public awareness campaign is unique, each campaign has some general components, which include the following:

- **Consideration of target audiences:** Consider the specific segments of your target audience from the outset. An enhanced understanding of your audience can help you tailor the PAC to appeal to audience views, needs, and opinions.
- **Messaging:** Families and providers are bombarded with advertising and other digital messages daily. PACs must compete with other messages and capture an audience who has a smaller attention span than in the past. For these reasons, PACs are most effective when their messaging is creative, succinct, and informative.
- **Planning:** Develop an overall design plan to guide the campaign. This plan includes information that is relevant to the message but also allows organizers to consider how to scaffold media types (for example, print, radio, TV, Twitter, Facebook) for lasting impact. For example, a PAC may be best delivered by having multiple media channels, so social media blasts may be coordinated with radio and TV advertisements. Also, PAC organizers must consider how long their campaign should last for them to achieve their goals.
- **Partnership development:** During the development and implementation phases, organizers should examine whether their PAC relates to other active initiatives at the local, regional, state, or national levels and identify opportunities to collaborate with and complement those initiatives. This may include partnering with other agencies that have related campaigns or initiatives, allowing PAC organizers to collectively reach a broader audience. Such partnerships may also help maximize resources for PACs with smaller budgets or fewer resources.
- **Complementary materials:** In addition to the PAC itself, organizers often create a suite of print and digital materials to extend the reach of their campaign.
- **Evaluation:** Develop and implement an evaluation plan for the PAC. Administrative evaluation includes tasks such as ensuring compliance with the original plan and timeline, managing the budget and staffing, and dealing with challenges that arise. Campaign evaluation consists of a set of measures or metrics to determine if the PAC is meeting its desired outcomes. This information is important for understanding the impact of the PAC.

**Recommendation:** Leveraging the power of your brand, design and execute an external multimedia campaign to increase awareness of your agency and website.

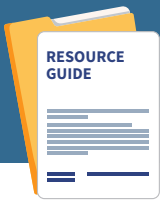
- **Develop a campaign plan.** If the message testing recommendation is implemented, external audiences can also weigh in on initial messages or campaign products via focus groups or message testing triads. This approach can ensure that messages are consistent across aspects of the campaign and help you establish your CCDF Lead Agency and its consumer education website as the gold standard for child care information with your audience.



## Recommendations for Increasing Visibility and Awareness for Your Consumer Education Website

- **Provide sufficient time for plan development (about 6 months).** This will give you enough time to develop multimedia products and adjust the campaign based on feedback from key internal stakeholders.
- **Launch a small internal campaign to complement the larger external campaign.** This might include an organization-wide email from leadership on the launch of the upcoming public awareness campaign for the consumer education website, as well as a sneak peek of any materials that are produced. Your agency should leverage its existing communications channels to distribute materials and conduct outreach to key internal audiences.
- **Develop a suite of digital and print materials that are easy to understand and tailored to specific audiences.** All materials should be 508 compliant in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act and designed to enhance social media sharing, improve awareness and credibility, and drive traffic to your consumer education website. Be sure to connect any promotional materials to your digital strategy goals and objectives.
- **Consider creating templates that display your new brand, contact information, and URL address for your consumer education website.** Make these templates available via download so that child care programs can use them to communicate with their families. Ensure that the template allows the program to incorporate their letterhead or logo.

**Recommendation:** Consider using a mix of three primary platforms for digital and social media promotion to reach target audiences. Work to identify demographics, characteristics, and media consumption habits of your target audiences to help hone strategies. Audiences often fall into multiple intersecting subgroups. Identifying where these audiences overlap and intersect will allow you to further refine your strategies. The table on the next page presents a sample of digital and social media promotion recommendations, by platform.



# Recommendations for Increasing Visibility and Awareness for Your Consumer Education Website

## Sample PAC Platform Recommendations

Platform	Placement	Rationale	How It Delivers on Objectives	Audiences
Google Display Network (GDN; this is where we buy online, mobile display, and video advertisements)	Desktop or mobile display and video advertisements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Delivers hyper-targeted messages via advertisements to target audiences</li> <li>• Has click-throughs, which increase web traffic and overall awareness</li> <li>• Delivers a high volume of advertisements at a cost-efficient rate</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increases awareness by driving users to your consumer education website to get more information</li> <li>• Gives visitors to the website access to key information, including contact information, to answer their questions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Your CCDF Lead Agency target audiences</li> <li>• Targeting parameters include demographics, interests, and geographic locations across your jurisdiction</li> </ul>
Facebook	Newsfeed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Presents attention-grabbing advertisements in a high-click and high-view environment</li> <li>• Offers high-impact advertisements that can feature multiple messages</li> <li>• Allows advertisements to be in a variety of formats, including photos, videos, and slideshows</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increases awareness by driving users to your consumer education website to get more information</li> <li>• Gives visitors to the website access to key information, including contact information, to answer their questions</li> <li>• Can also increase “likes” to your Facebook page to extend community audience reach</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Your CCDF Lead Agency target audiences</li> <li>• Targeting parameters include demographics, interests, geographic locations, keywords, and followed and liked pages</li> </ul>
Google AdWords	Advertisements that appear during a text search	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Presents advertisement-style messages at the top of the page to those actively searching for relevant information</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensures that users will reach your consumer education website and child care search tool</li> <li>• Recommendation includes click-to-call advertisement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Your CCDF Lead Agency target audience</li> </ul>



# Recommendations for Increasing Visibility and Awareness for Your Consumer Education Website

## 8. Develop a Website Analytics Program

Web analytics provide access to in-depth information about visitors to a website. Web analytics software provides opportunities to measure, collect, analyze, and report users' web data to understand and optimize website usage. With web analytics, agencies can take an evidence-based approach to gain insight into their website's user experience with data from actual user behaviors

Web analytics not only provide a process for measuring web traffic—they can also work as a tool for conducting user research and assessing and improving your digital communications strategies. You can use the results of web analytics to accomplish the following:

- Identify successes and failures
- Inform design and development
- Validate design decisions and test new ideas
- Spend resources smartly and appropriately



### Helpful Resources

- [Consumer Education Website Online Module Series: Module 3 - Using Data to Support Continuous Website Improvement](#)
- [Guide for Measuring Web Traffic and Engagement](#)

**Recommendation:** Develop a web analytics program to gain insights into how users are getting to your website and which pages they are visiting. Use your analysis to make strategic recommendations that lead to action planning for future content, design, and development sprints.

If you can determine which outreach efforts and content were successful and what contributed to that success, you can use that information to inform additional improvements or outreach efforts. Identifying these trends in the data can help you decide if you should do more or less of a particular action to improve outcomes for users and further your goals.

Please see [Consumer Education Website Online Module Series: Module 3 - Using Data to Support Continuous Website Improvement](#) for detailed guidance on developing, implementing, and maintaining an effective web analytics program.





# Recommendations for Increasing Visibility and Awareness for Your Consumer Education Website

## 9. Develop a Crisis Communications Process

A crisis often happens suddenly, unexpectedly, and demands a quick response. If communication is mismanaged, it can result in widespread confusion, frustration, and—ultimately—loss of community trust in your agency as the “go to” source for child care information. It can also result in reputation damage, increased litigation, and decreased employee and community morale. A jurisdiction’s CCDF Lead Agency and its CCDF-funded child care consumer education website should be the trusted source of up-to-date child care information. This is particularly crucial during any emergency or disaster, when stakeholders may be in urgent need of accurate, time-sensitive information.

Effective crisis communication aims to protect the reputation of the agency or organization and maintain its public credibility. Although planning for every kind of event is impossible, a well-managed crisis communications plan can help preserve your agency’s brand, reputation, and credibility as a trusted source of information during times of crisis. Mastering crisis communication is no easy feat, but these guidelines can help you respond more quickly during a disaster or emergency—like the recent global pandemic. The guidelines include the following:

- **Give people what they need when they need it.** People’s information needs evolve in a crisis. So should a good communicator’s content and messaging. Different forms of information can help your target audience respond and recover from an emergency or disaster more effectively.
- **Communicate clearly, simply, and frequently.** A crisis limits people’s capacity to absorb information in the early days. Focus on keeping listeners safe and healthy. Then repeat, repeat, repeat.
- **Choose candor over charisma.** Trust is never more important than in a crisis. Be honest about where things stand and maintain transparency to build loyalty and lead more effectively.
- **Revitalize resilience.** If a crisis grows into an economic crisis, accentuate the positive and strengthen communal bonds to restore confidence and connect stakeholders to key services and resources.
- **Distill meaning from chaos.** The crisis will end. Help your target audience make sense of all that has happened. Establish a clear vision for how the organization and your jurisdiction’s early education and care system will emerge from the crisis.



### Helpful Resources

- [Spotlight on Emergency Preparedness, Response, and Recovery Content Resource Suite](#)

**Recommendation:** Develop a crisis communications plan that details how your organization will communicate information about child care with key stakeholders during an emergency or disaster. This plan should:

- Identify key roles and responsibilities of the communications team and
- Set key messages and guidelines for holding statements, internal communications procedures, contacts and media lists, and other applicable communications documents.

**Recommendation:** Develop a crisis communications decision tree, similar to a media relations decision tree. This decision tree helps identify main points of contact, including the key decision-maker, and breaks down the internal communications process in times of crises. Hold mock crisis communications drills periodically throughout the year to practice how your agency will respond in the face of a crisis.

Remember that websites are a “go to” source for information in times of crisis—not only for the media, but also for your stakeholders and the community at large. Your consumer education website should be the “go to” source for child care information. As such, it should be updated quickly; serve as a source of reliable, objective information; and address the urgent information needs of its stakeholders. Work with your web development and information technology department to help ensure that the appropriate crisis communications team members can access and update the website from locations outside your building, should access to your physical office space be limited during a crisis.



# Recommendations for Increasing Visibility and Awareness for Your Consumer Education Website

## Appendix A. Messaging Architecture Example

A messaging architecture is a set of key words and phrases that convey your organization's messaging intent, priorities, and goals. It presents a hierarchy that is meant to help content creators and writers develop consistent, organized, and effective messages.

Use your mission statement as a starting point when developing content. How does using your mission statement as a reference point influence how you convey your message?

### Example Mission Statement

[CCDF Lead Agency] aims to help families find, choose, and access child care that meets their needs, help child care professionals and programs meet state child care requirements and enhance the quality of their programs, and build a comprehensive early education and care systems that supports the needs of families, children, providers, and the community.

### Definition

### Example

What key terms or phrases characterize your work? Consider including them in your content development for consistent messaging.

### Messaging Architecture

A small set of words or phrases that 1) convey the level of priority when writing, 2) are actionable and directly inform content decisions, and 3) are specific to communication.

**Reliable**—[CCDF Lead Agency] provides accurate, up-to-date information.

**Respected**—[CCDF Lead Agency] is the state's trusted source for child care information.

**Trustworthy**—[CCDF Lead Agency] is a good steward.

**Collaborative**—[CCDF Lead Agency] works with state partners to build awareness of and capacity for the state's early education and care system.

Who are you trying to reach via this message? What information are you trying to share? What action do you want your audience to take once they receive your message?

### Editorial Mission

The editorial mission provides writers with a framework which includes:

- Your target audience—who you can help most with this content.
- Deliverables to the audience—types of information you will provide through this content.
- Desired outcomes for the audience—what your audience should be able to do once they have read your content.

[The CCDF Lead Agency]'s digital communications efforts aim to 1) reach families, child care providers, and stakeholders to build awareness for the resources and services it offers, 2) help families and providers find easy-to-understand information about all relevant CCDF Lead Agency services—anytime, anywhere—so that families can use that information to make informed child care choices and providers can deliver quality child care services.

Use the Core Content Strategy Statement Template to get you started.

### Core Content Strategy Statement

The content [CCDF Lead Agency] produces helps **[goal]** by providing **[adjective]** content that makes **[target audience]** feel **[emotion]** as they **[take an action]**.

The content [CCDF Lead Agency] produces helps **families find child care that meets their needs** by providing **useful, easy-to-understand** content that makes **families** feel **confident** as they **search for and choose quality child care**.

- **Goal:** Deliver on its seven research opportunities
- **Goal:** Help families find child care that meets their needs
- **Audience:** Families
- **Desired action:** Search for and choose child care.

### [CCDF Lead Agency] Specific Content Strategy Statement



# Recommendations for Increasing Visibility and Awareness for Your Consumer Education Website

## Appendix B. Social Media Strategy Framework

Objectives	Resources	Audience and Allies	Tactics and Timing	Evaluation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What is the purpose of our social media presence?</li><li>• How does social media further our organizational mission?</li><li>• What action do we want our audience members to take?</li><li>• How will we know that we have been successful?</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What social media accounts do we already have? Who follows or engages with them?</li><li>• What social media content do we already have?</li><li>• What organizational resources can we use for social media?</li><li>• Who currently manages these accounts?</li><li>• How much time should the responsible staff person designate for this work?</li><li>• Can our budget support it?</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Who do we want to reach, and what action do we want them to take?</li><li>• How does this action support our objectives?</li><li>• Who does that audience already listen to who may be able to help us reach them?</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What platforms do our audience members use, and how do they use them?</li><li>• When is our audience using social media?</li><li>• What messages will convince our audience to take the action we want them to take?</li><li>• What kind of content delivery will attract and resonate with our audience?</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What metrics do we need to collect to measure success?</li><li>• When, where, and how will we collect those metrics?</li></ul>

This document provides a basic framework for developing a social media strategy. The columns should be addressed in order from left to right, and the answers to the questions in the previous columns should inform the answers in the subsequent columns.

National Cancer Institute. (2018). *Media relations decision tree* [Unpublished resource for Media Relations branch].

### Do You Have Questions?

If you have questions about whether your planned website enhancements meet Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) requirements, please consult with your [Office of Child Care regional office](#) for guidance.

If you would like technical assistance on developing and enhancing your consumer education website, contact the Child Care State Capacity Building Center ([CapacityBuildingCenter@ecetta.info](mailto:CapacityBuildingCenter@ecetta.info)).

The State Capacity Building Center (SCBC) works with state and territory leaders and their partners to create innovative early childhood systems and programs that improve results for children and families. The SCBC is funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Child Care.

### State Capacity Building Center, A Service of the Office of Child Care

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